Moonlight and Common Day

Louise Morey Bowman

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by

Louise Morey Bowman

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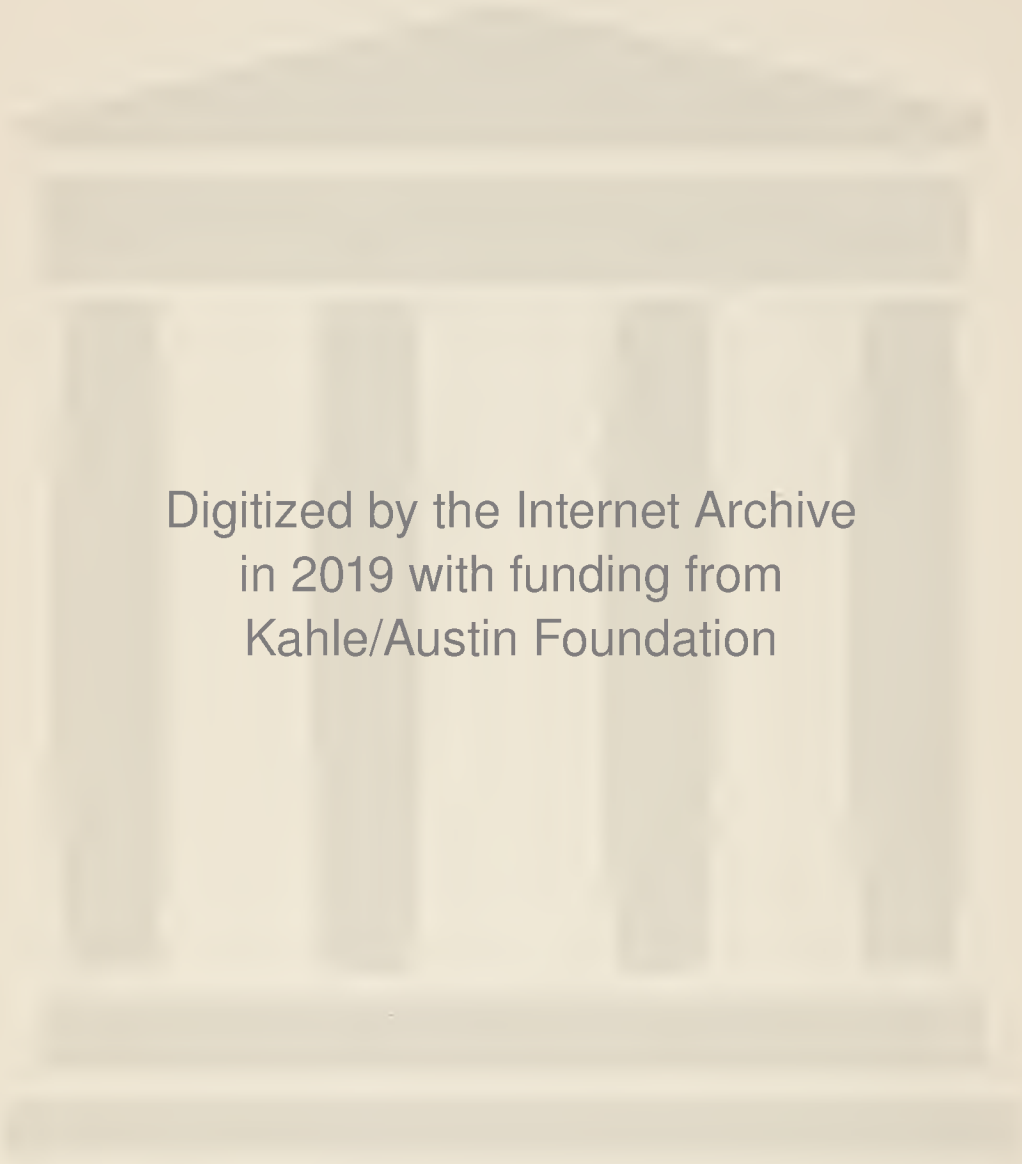
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TO
S. F. M.
AND
A. A. B.

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SACRAMENT

TO MY MOTHER

I cannot talk of her:
She's everywhere—
In the Spring trees' soft blooming,
In the air
That's filled with bird songs,
In a symphony,
Or golden throbbing of an organ prayer.
She's with me when I serve
Some hungry one with food.
She's with me when I'm dressed
In some gay, dainty frock for very best,
Whose colour puts me in a dancing mood.
When I write, read, or play my violin,
I hear her singing to me deep within.
She made a sacrament of life; and, hidden there,
She reaches out from God's eternity,
To touch all bread and wine
Of mine.

EARTH-BORN

DO you think God will make us forget—
When we wake up in Heaven—
All the queer, little earth-fashioned things
That are sacred as archangels' wings
Or the stars that are seven?
Our books, our green china with posies,
My white wedding gown with its roses,
The candles we light
In our wee house at night,
Your father's old clock with its wise friendly face,
And my mother's old lace—
Do you think Love can ever forget?

Yes, count me a lover of Earth
With its tears or its mirth;
Its wine that is bitter or bread that is sweet—
With the pink apple trees and the brown honey-bees,
With the far, purple lands—
And the warm golden sands—
And its queer little love-hallowed things
That are sacred as archangels' wings
Or the stars that are seven!
Do you think God will make us forget
When we wake up in Heaven?

MOONLIGHT AND COMMON DAY

LISTEN—you very very Few who will care to listen—
And I will tell you a story
Of moonlight.
Don't imagine because I try to tell stories of moonlight
That I am a poet—neurotic and mystic—
(Dearly as I love the things that some poets—neurotic and mystic—
Can write!)
As for me I love good food and beautiful clothing,
And well-ordered, punctual living
Behind tall, well-clipped hedges;
And practical, common-sense people.
But still——

Let us open my casement window, Beloved,
Where the dark leaves stir in the silence,
And the sweet, wet earth breathes softly
And murmurs an exquisite word.
Any moment out into the moonlight may issue
White creatures, and elfin-formed things that we know not,
Quaintly and solemnly marching and chaunting inaudibly.
Something stirs by the willows—
Do you know what that sound is, so lovely and shuddering?
It's the owl's cry.
The grave, small, gray owl that in purple dusk comes sometimes
To sit on my window-sill, eyes open, dreaming,—
Hark how he is linking us in with the moonlight,
Like a horn faintly blown in blue heaven.
(Do you remember, Beloved, a night,
Glad years ago in a pine-wood,
In the moon-lighted darkness—
How the rhythmical thunder of waves on the white shore
Blended with us and our heart-beats, Beloved?)

Let us lean from the window
As if faintly-blown horns have called us to answer three questions.
Is Life food and raiment and conquest?
Is Love conquest and intrigue and passion?
Is Death a gaunt figure white-shrouded
Dealing blows out of blackness?
Let us fling back our eternal "No!" as an answer—
To the listening Silence,
While the sweet, wet earth still breathes softly
An exquisite word.

But tomorrow
I shall go right on living
As unworthy as ever of the moonlight
Locked up in my soul.

* * * *

That is my story of moonlight—
No story at all, now say you?
But it all lies written
Between the lines.

THE APPLE ORCHARD

I.

(The Woman)

O beautiful green slopes of wonder
High-flung on the hill!
The city below drones and hums—like a distant thunder
Its grim voices thrill.
O white apple-trees . . . still . . . as still
As a ravishing dream of passion fulfilled,
Breathed on the darkness of night
When all passion is still—
And as light
And as fleeting as frost-branches laid on the window pane.
O wonderful apple bloom!
Little, joyous, rosy bud like a baby's finger—
Yet there is no room,
Underneath your scented boughs,
For a woman's sad heart to linger.
Sorrow creeps out of the apple orchard
With a shuddering cry.
Now from the road that leads to the city
We two gaze back at the orchard—
Sorrow and I.

II.

(The Man)

I have searched through the orchard to find her—
My full-bosomed Love, with the flesh of warm whiteness,
And sorrowing dark eyes, wide open and wistful.
Crimson and gold are the apples all fallen.
The orchard was breathing of richness and passion,

And drowsiness—yesterday.
Here when I entered I cried out in joy
Here is Harvest!
But the apples have fallen, the sunshine has faded.
From the scent of the apples
Rises an incense
To bare, empty altars.
I follow, lonely, unmated,
The path to the city of workers.

III.

(He and She together under snow-laden apple trees.)
(The Woman)
See, my Beloved!
The white trees are sleeping,
Beneath the soft burning of winter moon, keeping
Her marvellous secrets above their white breathing.
Oh I think we are reaping
In this strange new silence. . . .united. . . .
Our Harvest. . . .
Beloved!
(The Man)
How I searched for you. . . .Woman and Priestess. . . .
All through the orchard and found you not;
Searched for you, hungering and thirsting,
And turned from the harvest. . . .
Seeking you.
(The Woman)
Are they sleeping. . . .those white apple trees. . . .
Are they sleeping?

(Mystic chorus of apple trees, very, very softly breathed through the orchard:)

We are not sleeping
We are but keeping
Watch over earth-folk. . . .
Fruition and bloom
Wait here immortal
In God's ante-room.

(Folk Of The World)

What a night! What stars!

(A Child)

Mother! Where's Heaven?

FIREFLIES

AN old, old couple in a blossoming garden. . . .
Love, inarticulate, nestles close between them. . . .
And the old woman and the old man.
And Love,
Sit watching fireflies. . . .
Tiny torches flashing with pale, green light
In the heavy white dew.
Oh roses. . .roses. . .roses. . .cease your blossoming!
Kind crystal dew
Put out the firefly torches
Before they light the little paths to sorrow. . . .
Earth is too beautiful. . . .
And the man and the woman are old, so old,
And tired.
Now they sit quietly with calm, closed eyes. . . .
Only Love, nestled close between them,
And inarticulate, with folded wings,
Watches the last of the fireflies in the dew.

BLUE DOORWAY

A dreamy-eyed, light-footed child asked her
"What is a great love like?"
And she did not answer—
For she wanted the child to go on dancing and dreaming
A little while longer
In her rose-coloured dawn.

But to herself she whispered
"Love is like a crimson flame, in the morning.
But at the end of the day Love is tenderness,
Forgiving and forgetting,
Escape from loneliness—
Like a blue doorway that opens
To white peace."

DARKNESS

IT seems to be a foregone conclusion,
That if I worship the new gods
Sincerely, in the sunshine—
I must not pray in the moonlight,
By the shrines of the old gods,
Where the cherry blossoms still shine.
But sometimes in the darkness
I mistake the shrines.
And I kneel and pray and the gods speak to me.
And until I breathe suddenly
The scent of the cherry blossoms,
I do not know whether they are really
The old or the new shrines—
And by then I have wept, and prayed,
And been answered.
So what does it matter?

LYDIA

DOST know the white, wild-cherry boughs
Ablow midst green of May,
That make enchanted palaces
Of houses old and gray?
(Ah me, that sweet, wild springtime!)"

"Once on a Sunday morn they bloomed,
'Twas miracle o' May—
So white, so white, so wonderful—
They'll bloom again, you say?
(Ah me, this long, long winter!)"

All in a bleak December,
A-trying to remember
Her joyous, white, wild-cherry blooms,
She went to find the May.

DINNER OF HERBS

I dined at a strange old Inn with Sorrow.
Oh but the wine and the bread were bitter—
Never a morsel of cream or honey,
Only the bread and the wine . . . so bitter . . .
Had we—Sorrow and I.

I supped at that same strange Inn with Pleasure.
Oh but the berries were red and juicy—
Cream and honey and sweets a-plenty,
Nectar, cakes, and a wondrous pastry.
Then at last I rose from the table—
"What! Have you finished so soon, my lady?"
Pleasure—he leered at me.

"What shall we bring you?" the Inn folk asked me
Bowing before me low.
And I, with my hands outstretched, I answered
"Wine and bread that are bitter, bitter—
As you served me long ago."

ON THE MOUNTAIN

I. MORNING

A lyric of green leaves.
Cool bird notes
From soft, bubbling throats.
Warm ripples of gold like a brook in its laughter
Flowing down from the sun—
And the day is begun.
Love! Are you waking?

II. NIGHT

THE sunset is ended:
And faded in violet hush, like the violin's croon,
The great splendid crash of its red and gold trumpets is blended
With one lingering, dark, crimson chord as from deep-toned bassoon,
While the ancient, grey winds whisper mysteries.

Now the cool, velvet darkness enfolds us
In passion-filled sweetness that holds us,
And closes our eyelids in sleep.

Lonely whip-poor-wills, calling in far valleys deep,
Their eerie watch keep—
While close in my arm Love lies sleeping.

THE EDGE O' THE WORLD

ONCE I stood at the edge o' the world—
Were you ever there?
The sky came down to an opal sea,
Out there in space hung a dream-made ship
And the earth was only a narrow strip
Of sea-shells, ground by the wheels of Time.
No living things but my Love and I,
And one white bird that was sailing by—
But ah how foolish ! Why do I try
To tell it now . . . like a stifled cry!
My edge o' the world!

Back to day in the valley!
Small, green world, so sheltered and warm,
Fruit trees white where the brown bees swarm,
Gay little crowded gardens blow,
Gay little feet run to and fro—
On every side there are folk to greet—
How heavy the air—so still and sweet!
O green valley how far away . . .
How far . . . from my wonderful, lonely day—
My edge o' the world!

THE POET

I sang to my King
And he listened,
Though I was only his Fool.
But his Minstrel had fled
And drowned himself
In a darkling, woodland pool.
And so when I said
"I can sing a bit"—
They took me in to the King,
Where he sat and gloomed
In his velvet chair,
A-turning his great gold ring.

I said "Sire, I'll give you a draught o' dream"—
And I piped it low with a croon,—
And I sang of the things that I know. I know
The breathless hush in a summer noon,
The silver ship of the Moon. . . the Moon,
And the curve of the wave below.
I sang of the Year's strange, golden loom,
And the Rainbow's end in the greenwood's gloom,
And the fall of the crystal snow.
And a tiny, amethyst cup of dew
Quaffed at dawn, when the world was new
And the King and his Fool were young, were young . . .
All that was my draught o' dream.

Then they whispered "The King grows childish!
He is frail and his years are long.
Who would grudge him the comfort he seems to take
In the poor, old Fool and his song!"
But a learned Sage spoke low to me—
"They call ye' a Fool!—*They're wrong!*"

SEA SAND

BETWEEN the rythmical, unfathomed sea,
And the rich, warm fecundity of land
There lies the sand,
The shifting sand of beach and dune,
Pure, strange, sea dust, so alien to green earth,
With its brown furrows that the ploughman makes
Ready for sowers—and for miracle.
Here on the sand,
I lie and watch the coarse sea-grass that creeps
Like an adventurer along the dunes,
With wild pea-vines that bravely cling and spread
Tenacious tendrils in this sterile soil . . .
A barren mockery of useful bloom.

I let a little handful of the sand
Drift slowly through my fingers, and I see
Its myriad tiny atoms—shells and stones
That long ago the great waves tossed and ground
To starry powder on the rocky ledge.

At sunset out on the wet, shining sand
Left by the ebbing tide, rare colours fall,
And linger there as if they loved the sand.
Who dreams at noontide that its level ways
Can hold such colour: rose and turquoise green,
Purple and gold, and even a crimson glow
Just for a moment, till the splendour dies . . .

Then the moon, silvery and alone, shines down
Upon the sand—pure, strange, sea-dust of Time.

SEA LAVENDER

MY Puritan Grandmother!—I see her now,
With placid brow,
Always so sure
"That no things but the right things shall endure!"
Sombrely neat, so orderly and prim,
Always a little grim,
Austere but kind. . . .
Smooth-banded hair and smoothly-banded mind.

But let me whisper it to you today—
I know it now—
That deep in her there was a flame at play.
Beneath that brow
The blue-grey eyes sought beauty, found it too
Most often by the ocean's passionate blue.
Her sea-beach treasures—shells and coloured weed
Gathered and hoarded with glad human greed—
They warm my heart today with insight new.
How vividly I see her, frail and old,
A tiny, black-clothed figure on the beach,
Compactly wrapped against the sea-wind's cold,
Patiently waiting till waves let her reach
Some sandy strip, where purple, amber, green,
Her lacy sea-weed treasures could be seen.
(She pressed and mounted them—frail tangled things!
Handled by her, fit to trim fairies' wings.)

So I recall her,
Searching salt-sea pools
For Beauty's shadow.
All her rigid rules,
And cold austereness with a storm-tossed child,
Melt into airs of evenings, warm and mild.
And I find revelation, sweet indeed
In her dear treasures of sea shells and weed.

THE NORTH ROOM

THE little room wherein I sleep and wake
Has windows northward set, against a wall,
And though it's white and sweet, with warmth and air,
The real sun does not creep inside at all.

But from my neighbour's windows, in the wall,
The sunlight flashes bravely back to mine.
Pale yellow gleams, they dance upon my bed,
And stand to me for symbol and for sign.

Set wide thy little windows, O my soul!
And welcome sun that shines for others bright,
Nor mourning that it is not now thine own. . . .
Even reflected sunbeams can give light!

THE FORGOTTEN ROAD

I know a little lonely country Road,
Grass-grown and shady, and a little sad,
Unused, and lost in an enchanted wood,
Though once, it was a highway, broad and glad.

Now very few its secret entrance find,
It lies so hidden from the world of men.
On foot I found it and on foot return
To feel its wistful mystery again.

There are so few such roads left us today,
And yet we need them sorely—for with wings
Agleam, and bird notes, my Road lures me on
To the hushed country of Forgotten Things.

SENTRY (*at the Front*): Halt! who goes there?
A Little Ghost: It is only I, kind sir: you must let me through!
Sentry: Little white thing, stop!
Where do you come from?
These are the lines of the allied armies.
Little Ghost: Sir, I'm the ghost of a dream
That the Prussians have murdered.
Once my robe was pure, soft, shining:
Once I lived in a deep old forest:
Once they fed me with love and with music.
Now I must go to a far, new country—
I and these others, my little white sisters.
Strange, new soldier, give me the pass-word—
Kind sir, let us through!
Sentry: God! But this war is a queer war!
Look at 'em—starved white ghosties!—
Waitin' for me to pass'em
Beyond our lines!
Me! I'm a hard-headed, practical. . . .
I never had any traffic with dreams.
Why, the world's turned dippy!
Halt, I say!
Numberless Little Ghosts (*trying to pass him, wailing softly*):
We are the ghosts of dreams
That the Prussians have murdered.
Now we must go to a far, new country.
Strange, new soldier, give us the password—
Kind sir, let us through!

Sentry: How white and shinin' their odd wee faces!
Well then, its "Christ"—can ye say it ghosties?
All the Little Ghosts (*together joyously*):
Now we can search for our far new country!
"Christ" is the password the soldier gives us.
Thank you, thank you, kind sir.
(*They flock swiftly past him; their tattered filmy rags blow softly against him, and now and then small skeleton hands reach out and touch him gently.*)
Sentry: Haven't ye one that would stay for a bit with me?
Now that I've passed the whole lot of ye, ghosties?
Wouldn't one stay with a dull, lonely fellow
Just for the company?
First Little Ghost: I will stay with you, strange, new soldier,
Where you guard the walls for the world.
(*She grows suddenly tall and very beautiful with a shining robe and crown of stars.*)
All the other Little Ghosts (*calling joyfully and softly from far away behind the lines*):
We are the ghosts of dreams
That the Prussians have murdered.
Forbid us not, for we have the password—"Christ."

ALTAR FIRE

FIRE. . . .that is miracle
Not of our world alone,
But of all the wheeling, throbbing space beyond. . . .
Vast living Fire. . . .supernal, consuming Fire. . . .
Now to you a chant of worship,
That I conceive
Poised upon tip-toe, wild and free
For one small moment. . . .
As the power is given.

Yet to bring forth this chant of worship,
I, a woman of earth, must kneel and dream
Upon my hearth,
Where glows that bit of vast, supernal Fire
That my frail hands can feel. . . .
Fire that has now become my own,
And my Beloved its master,
Yes, almost its creator!
For see now. . . .
Has he not reared the sheltering tall bricks,
Wisely conceived to shield, direct, control
This god?
And has not he
Cut the rich wood that feeds the flaming thing?. . . .
Dead, crisping pine and silvery, crackling birch,
And logs of snapping beech,
And the sap-oozing maple. . . .
Kindled with clusters of pine needles dry,
That swiftly become
Quivering lace-work,
Curling and writhing like living, blood-red tendrils,
Then leaping high into wide, golden flames.

Mine, mine you are tonight, oh Fire!
Kin to volcanoes. . . .you? To age-old burning stars?
To cataclysmic forest conflagrations?
Furious follower of earthquake. . . .you?
Small, peaceful, purring god!—
Warm, comforting,
That burns so softly in our quiet room,
So soothingly,
With all the power of infinite Power subdued
And brought within the scope
Of Man. . . .playing with fire
As a child plays with an old, well-loved toy.

I close my eyes and listen to the fire. . . .
It breathes and purrs
With a soft, whispering vibration,
Then it stirs
With delicate, staccato crackling. . . .
Pizzicato like the tense, fairy notes
The violinists pluck from the four strings
As an expectant prelude to a burst of coloured flame.
Or like an echo. . . .after the throbbing end.
Oh ! Fire . . . unthinkingly I spoke of Music,
Drifting through fancy,
Into a whimsical simile. . . .and lo!
I realize. . . .I know. . . .
So. . . .you are linked with Music. . . .
Wonderful!
Here is the woven basket that we filled
With salty driftwood on the beach.
Let us heap driftwood on the fire
And wait
For colours, now.

Oh tiny, magical, elemental flames
Of blue and green!. . .
Flickering, creeping, glinting,
Elusive as the tints
That shimmer in the ocean's seething tides,
Or lurk within the shivering, silver fog.
Or hide in the dew-drop on the quivering leaf.
Fantastic whim to link the blue and green of water
With driftwood flame?. . . .
Well. . . .let that pass.
Watch now the roaring splendour of deep red, and blinding gold,
That quickens our heart-beats with its force and power. . . .
Till it falls, and falls at last, as evening wears away,
Into hot, smouldering caverns without flame. . . .
And then. . . .at last. . . .
Sinks low. . . .and lower. . . .
Into the cold, grey ashes.
The god has fled.

And so. . . .my chant of homage to the fire
Is over.
Ashes lie upon my hearth.
But they have held for me
The universe. . . .the living elements.
God of the Universe. . . .
How I love your fire!

THE BIRTHPLACE

I go forth all alone, on a still, cold night,
Out of the great, friendly city where I have found freedom—
Where the footsteps of comrades and joyous fellow-workers
Pass over my threshold.
It is white Yule-tide.
There is no wind
That can link earth and heaven together with whispering,
But stars, stars everywhere, and a solemn moon
Burning with pale, green light of the Great God's magic.
I travel so fast and so far on the highway of memory,
And come to the town—
Hill-set and river-divided—
Where I was born
On a winter morning.
So I come back at last,
Counting the bridges—
"One, two, three—and the foot-bridge."
Here a child knows in the Springtime
Rushing of mighty waters.
And the clear, far whiteness
Of hills that breathe and change with immortal seasons.
How vividly strange to one's soul in a winter midnight
Is the town one was born in!
Shuddering and exulting
Like a child who plays with his terrors
I speed through the snow and the silence
Laughing, triumphant!
"You are mine now—all my own—Town!
In your sleep I caress you.
See! I have brought to you in the moonlight

All my joys and my tears and my freedoms,
My triumphs—and failures.
I pile them all up in a tiny heap on your central bridge
And stand waiting.
Will you accept them
From your child?
For once again as of old I love you. . . .love you. . . .
As if you were really all the world. . . .
And very, very beautiful."

But when the Town stirs in the dawn
I am far, far away—
With the towers of the city rose-flushed in the sunrise,
Before me.

* * * *

In the old Town this morning
The first one who goes over the bridge
Will kick a pile of melting snow-balls into the river,
And think "Some child put them there."

WIND

THE Wind is a black-winged beast tonight.
I toss and shudder and long for light.
Oh cruel talons that grasp with might
My casement window— how frail it seems—
How it opened once to the moonlight gleams,
Rustle of leaves and the tiptoe dreams—
But now it is shutting a wild Thing out—
A wingéd beast in a mad death rout—
(Oh the great, black wings on-rushing!)

Was it the Wind that yesterday
Crooned so soft in the bent sea-pine?
Touching my lips like a pungent wine,
On the cliff top there, with the lichened turf
(Marriage of sea and of rich, brown earth).
Bayberry bushes of frosted green
Guarded that tryst of a king and queen.
Sun-warmed strawberries formed the feast—
(Ah-h-h! The rush of that black-winged Beast!)

Yet I remember the Wind *that* day
Tore rose petals in wanton play. . . .
Yesterday was long years ago
And my own true Love was there.

THE LOVER

OH such a windy windy day
So glad and wild and sweet!
A day all made for strong white wings,
And song and dancing feet.
Everything's white and blue and gold—
The sea and sand and sky—
And oh the wind, the gay, salt wind,
That frolics blithely by.

Oh windy, lovely day so bright,
Oh, frolic wind so glad!
Stay in my soul, a memory
For still days grey and sad.
Your blue and white and gold, your song,
Your white wings soaring free—
Oh ardent Lover Wind that brought
My soul's own wings to me!

THE MOURNER

THE night that wee Francesca died
The little night wind sighed and sighed.
Chill and dew-laden it crept in.
Beneath her tiny hands, so thin,
I laid some little friendly flowers
That saw her laugh in sunshine hours.
She loved those pansy faces best,
Wise-eyed they went with her to rest.
The trees looked very dark and old,
The stars gleamed so far off and cold.
Only the little night wind sighed
The night that wee Francesca died.

THE MESSENGER

FAR out from the whirlpool cities
They call and they call to me
Where the journey ends—
My infinite Friends
The Wind and the Sea.

Tonight the Wind in the inland woods,
Where my sheltered house is set,
Carries the rush of the sea waves past
Till my cheeks feel cold and wet.
And I smile and shudder. . . .
"What wouldst thou of me
O Wind and Sea?"

Far out from the whirlpool cities
They call and they call to me
Where the Journey ends—
My infinite Friends
The Wind and the Sea.

THE WEALTHY SHEPHERD

AS I came in from the green South Downs
I heard the pedlars cry
"What d'ye lack?" and "What d'ye lack?"
"Come lasses and lads, come buy!"
So they chattered and clacked away
All at the fair on a summer day.
"Satin waistcoats, and scented gloves,
Silken hose or a cage of doves,
Sweets and 'winkles and hot meat pie—
What d'ye lack? Come buy! Come buy!"

And I answered them as a free soul may,
Fresh from the green South Downs that day,
"I lack nothing that ye can sell,
I've flung my pence in the Wishing Well,
Bathed my face in the morning dew,
Broken my fast on the white milk new,
Breathed the scent of the wild sweet-briar,
Listened long to a sky-lark choir.
All that I'm lacking, I tell ye true,
Are my green meadows and hills of blue."

How they laughed and jeered me, those pedlar folk.
"Look at the daft one! He's a jest!
Buttercup gold in his hands he holds!
Fool! Get back to your South Down folds."
Back from the low-land fair I haste,
Far from the clatter and clack and waste.
There I find in my sweet, green dell
Three new lambs by the Wishing Well;
Sweet wild thyme and the glint of dew,
Treasure trove of the old and new.
But down at the fair the pedlars cry
"What d'ye lack? Come buy! Come buy!"

THE LOST SHEPHERD

MY soul and I have been a-wandering
In upland pastures, where the grasses wave
Against the blue, and in the listening ear
The joyous gipsy winds breathe messages
From deep, enchanted woods of ancient pine.
We wandered all the day, and then at last
A red sun sank behind dim walls of grey.
The sheep had found the shelter of the fold,
And the vast stillness lulled and cradled us
As if it rocked a weary child to sleep.
I think I never could have waked at all
Out of that wondrous moment, but there thrilled
Down in the valley mists, a whip-poor-will,
Wistfully human yet so alien,
Linking familiar door-yards to the night.

And slowly I went home to candle light.
But, through these dingy hours of working days,
My soul—that did not wake and come with me
To food and candle light—still wanders there,
And tends a little flock of dreamy sheep
In upland pastures, where the grasses wave.

YOUNG WORLD

PASSIONATE March winds called in the wild, grey trees this morning.
The frozen brook
Has suddenly become a broad and turbulent stream,
Rushing through the deep ravine,
Swirling about the banks and bending bushes.
Winter is vanquished.
Yet in the harsh, raw air,
In the wet, clinging slime of mud and clay,
And lowering sky and bare, wind-tortured branches,
There lies no beauty or peace.
Peace that has brooded in austere purity
On the white snow-fields sleeping in amber sunshine;
Beauty in magical jade and diamond ice,
Or feathery, silvery powder of new-fallen snow.

But with the rushing of streams and winds there came
Stirring of unborn hopes. . . .
Passion, unrest, yearning, deep discontent,
Something that might become, all suddenly,
Joy. . . .
In an instant passing.
I have felt all day
This sense of questing youth throughout the world.

Before the day had passed,
Waiting in a crowded thoroughfare,
Two Chinamen appeared:
Immobile, passive, enigmatic beings,
Watching the ways of men with the Orient's weird gaze,
Lids dropping low over dim, slanting eyes.
One heavily muffled, seemed to be in pain,

That only his dark, claw-like hands revealed
In a slow writhing, half-hidden in his sleeves.
No other movement in mask-like face or form.
There for an instant I saw old China brooding,
Ancient—old—
Weighed with the burdens and pains of long, unfathomed, years.
And from those low-caste forms inscrutable,
My thoughts turned to sages, philosophers,
With essence of three religions mingled in their brains.
Calm ivory hands holding vast mystic keys

Weary I climbed the hill and now I sit beside my fire
While darkness gathers in,
Pondering a little while about the world,
The world that suddenly seemed old, dark, worn, this afternoon,
As men and women feel suddenly old sometimes
In an instant's passing.
Joy yields to sorrow.
Passion turns to pain.
But listen—soul of me!
Out in the strange March evening
Passionate winds are calling,
Even louder than they did in the grey morning.
The swollen stream rushes on.
O Youth of Springtime—
Youth!—
What passion, hope, freedom, in your untutored song!
The world is young, young, young tonight!
What will tomorrow bring?

I SAW THE SPRING

I saw the Spring today
Not as a flower-wreathed maiden in green gown,
But an old man,
Who, in a cloud of soft blue smoke, bent down
Over a smouldering fire of long-dead leaves,
And dry, dead branches,
Patient, hopeful, calm,
Steadfast as pine-trees through the winter snows;
Yet with an eager fire in his deep eyes,
He burns the winter's refuse.
He is Spring. . . .
Old, gentle, wise,
Expectant as the rich, brown, waiting sod,
While incense of his Spring fire mounts
To God.

FROM AN OPEN WINDOW

WHAT is there new to sing of the Spring
My heart?
Pale silver-green branches out-flung on the shimmering blue—
We have read of them over and over again—
That is true!
But oh it is an unopened heart,
Or a dumb, hurt singer,
Who does not listen or start,
When a green bough brushes the window-ledge,
When the scent of the grass drifts up the lane,
And sweet—sweet like honey—the soft, warm rain,
When the robin sings in the lilac hedge.
Then we must—oh we must—sing too!
My heart!
That is Spring!

THE CLOVER FIELD

I left the crowded cities,
With their knowledge and their folly,
And wandered down the by-ways,
So lonely, wild and free.
But not for me the mountain
With its peak of purple grandeur,
The forest, or the desert,
Or the great unresting sea.
For in a homely valley
The air was sweet with honey,
And there the brown Earth-Mother
Held a clover field for me.

Heigh-ho! Earth's sweet, red clover
And the warmth and kindly healing!
I laid me down and listened
To the bee's deep, drowsy runes,
Till in their rhythmic humming
I caught a lilt and cadence
(Like elfin bell-notes pealing)
Of forgotten cradle tunes.

O not for me the mountain
With its peak of purple grandeur.
And not for me the desert,
Nor the great unresting sea!
For in a homely valley
With the wise old bees a-humming,
The healing, brown Earth-Mother
Held a clover field for me.

SHADOWS

OAK tree,
Elm tree,
And apple bough. . . .
Their shadows fall
On the cool green grass.
Shadows of willow trees lie in the shimmering pool,
And the pine trees' flicker
On crystal snow.

(Even the baby, chubby and sweet,
Poised on her tiny, tottering feet,
Casts now *her* shadow—an instant's gloom,
Over a purple hyacinth bloom.)

Last winter, set in a fire-lit room,
Were two sprays of long-dried goldenrod. . . .
Feathery, frosty plumes.
They were certainly ghostly enough in themselves,
But the magical firelight leaped and shone
Till their dainty, elusive shadows fell,
Etched on the oak-paneled wall.
Each was an exquisite mystical ghost
Of Beauty—
A miracle truth.
Then the firelight died and they went out
Into the Silence, where shadows dwell.

WINTER SYMPHONY

I. PRELUDE

LOVE ! come in out of the storm !
The querulous, grey-clothed Year has grown old, so old.
Strong splendid Love, all white with the driven snow—
Dear cheeks and lips so cold
And yet so warm aglow—
Come in out of the storm!
Our fire leaps, warm
With coloured gleams,
As if the Summer slept
Upon our hearth, with dreams
Of colours kept
To warm love's pulsing heart through wintry blast.
Summer's long past,
Yet we know magic charm
To guard the Year from harm.
Say it over now with me,
Punctuate with kisses three. . .

Sweethearts true,
Rainbow's hue,
Promise hold.
Red and blue,
Green and gold
Safe enfold!

(*Charm: to be said*
on a hearth.)

Love! come in out of the storm!

II. NIGHT OF STORM

NOW the snow lies heaped upon our window-sills—
Drifting, drifting—
Now a new voice all our woodland valley fills
Drifting, drifting—
Higher yet and higher on the pane
Press the weird, white fingers
Lifting, sifting
That strange death-like dust on winter's pathway. . . .
Snow.
Death-like dust, yet formed of frolic crystals,
Elfin, and akin to floating blossom.
When the snow flakes fluttered down today
On our rosy baby in his sleigh,
Eyes of wonder lifted
Watching the down-drifted
Miracles.
(Now Heaven grant this night of storm
All wee lambs sleep, folded warm
Even as mine.)
Dark trees bend and shrink and shudder,
From the white snow wraiths that hurry
Up and down the woodland ways
Pause, and then more wildly scurry,
Pause, and gaze,
Marking each dark tree-trunk for their own.
Then, with shivering moan,
They fling far their shrouding arms of white
Round the tree trunks in the night;

And the trees, so gaunt and tall,
Suddenly accept, withdraw
From our sight, and we with awe
Realize the wailing wraiths
Become conquerors.

* * * * * * * * *

Now we'll watch no more the trees and snow.
Draw the curtains close and closer, turn
Where our hearth-fire and our candles burn,
While the night
Surges round our little walls in storm-tossed might.

III. NOONTIDE THAW

SPRING Day comes to January:
Hush of the winds; long jade icicles melting;
Sky so blue; great excitement of sparrows;
Gleam of the sun on the dark, wet tree-trunks
And in she slips! Oh the baffling truant!
Hidden, and yet with her soft, warm breathing
Making us thrill with a vague, sweet prescience,
Making us watch—half ashamed of our watching—
For exquisite, wonderful things to happen:
Crocus and daffodil out of the snow banks,
Robin a-nesting in ice-coated apple trees,
Green fairy rings on a barren, brown hill-side;
Then, when the sunshine has faded and vanished,
Pattering rain drops, soft hushed to a lullaby.

* * * * * * * * * * *

If I should find, folded within my hand,
One small pale crocus, a token from Spring Day,
I should accept it without wondering!

IV. WHITE MEMORIES

NOW while the tall, green grasses wave,
And the morning-glories open wide,
Wild roses coquette with old stone walls, grave
In their strength, and high runs the summer's tide
In foaming billows of daisy bloom. . . .
Who remembers the winter's gloom?

* * * * * * * * * * *

Yet like a flight of strong, white-wingéd birds
From some far shore, alien and beautiful,
The laughing, lyric rhythm of summer day
Is broken by sudden chords. . . . *white memories.*

SHE PLANS HER FUNERAL

BRING to me then all passionate, crimson flowers
And lay them on my breast.
They shall be symbols of the love-lit hours—
And Love is best.
Folk who believe in Immortality,
Why should they pass in panoply of woe?
I would be linked with colour and ecstacy
That day I go.

Linked with glad dancers, their white limbs set free,
And rhythmical through veils of filmy green,
With children, rose-flushed with a mystic glee—
All these I mean
To leave as wishes for my funeral day.
But, lest I burden those I leave behind,
Let me add, hastily, that any way
They care to manage—
Will be to my mind!

* * * * * * * * * * *

Yet I crave mightily for that last hour
At least one dancer and one crimson flower.

TWO COMPOSITIONS BY DEBUSSY

I. "GARDENS UNDER THE RAIN"

SHOWERS of rain drops are caught
On the drooping, white lilies tall,
Swinging, swinging.
Far in the depths of the wet, green, elm trees
A white-throated sparrow is dreamily, wistfully
Singing, singing.
Suppose that the sun should come out now?
Oh what would become then
Of all this wet, rain-drenched mystery?
Where would it vanish? Hush, no one tells!
To all the flowers now are the rain-drop bells
Clinging, clinging,
In the breathless gardens.

II. "THE SUBMERGED CATHEDRAL"

FAR down under the surf now lies the Cathedral.
Solemnly, mournfully beautiful,
Sound the deep bells, and the great waves
Surge over the marble pillars
In rhythmical thunder.
Shivered rose windows are floating in myriad fragments,
And small, playful waves are rippling
Through delicate carvings of wood
And through shattered mosaics.
Far down under the surf now lies the cathedral
With its deep bells
Still sounding. . .

TIMEPIECES

I.

THERE are three wise clocks in the house.
In a winter night I heard them striking twelve. . . . ,
Answering each other,
Humanly.
The tall, ancient and beautiful clock in the hall,
In an inlaid case with the Prince of Wales' feathers,
And the quaint, painted posies in the corners of the dial,
With the painted lady above the dial
Who sits on a green bank,
Holding a white cockatoo on her hand
So gracefully.
The cold, silver notes of this Clock began. . . .
And then there broke in lustily
The hoarser, more human note of the other old Grandfather's Clock
On the upper landing. . . .
In its plain, massive case, with the little, old ship
With wee white sails,
That rocks backward and forward. . . .
Backward. . . .forward. . . .
Charming
The eyes of generations of small, wondering children
Climbing up to nursery tea in the twilight.
And last came the slow, ghostly striking
Of a very, very old Clock, on the library mantel. . . .
A Clock who has always worked very hard
And who has to be wound every evening,
And who has never been sure of a steady, aristocratic foundation
To stand on. . . .
Like the others,
But who still strikes, feebly and truthfully,
Proud to give service.

Three old clocks very wise and human. . . .
And faithful,
Striking the hours on a winter night,
With the age-old Moon looking in at the windows.

II.

In a house that is suddenly left empty,
Unlighted, alone,
Through the long mystical hours of a night
An old eightday Clock strikes. . . .
Twelve. . . .
One. . . .
Two. . . .
Three. . . .
Is there anything so silent. . . .lonely. . . .vast. . .
As a Clock striking hours in a house. . . .
With no one to listen?
Is there no one to listen?

III.

The Sundial is very, very old
To be counting the hours in my modern garden,
Where flowers bloom in wild riot of colour,
And modern poets read *vers libre*
Under the shade of a jolly young maple tree.

I think I shall plant tall, stately white phlox
All around the Sundial
Next summer.
And try to have more spaces of green, velvet turf. . . .
And perhaps buy a peacock.

For we cannot read only Elizabethian lyrics and sonnets
Beside the sundial,
And it is so aloof and so old for my modern garden,
Although, in the sunshine, so faithful. . . .
Yes, it should have a peacock!

IV.

The winter moonlight is streaming down
Into the sunken garden.
Yesterday I laid a vivid spray of red Autumn berries
Upon the sundial,
Over the calm old motto. . . .
"Light and shade by turns but Love always."

Now the first snow has fallen, and in the pale moonlight
The Sundial stands as aloof as ever on its slender pedestal. . . .
Holding quietly a white crown,
Dropped lightly upon it
From the mysterious sky that holds the Sun and the Moon.

V.

I have written these sketches of clocks and a sundial
Waiting in the power-house of a great factory. . . .
Where a chair is courteously placed for me
In a bare, lofty room
Between two monstrous whirring engines
Apparently ceaseless.
At first their rush and their crashing roar
Terrified me.
I wanted to scream and to run. . . .gasping. . . .
Now the noise has become rhythmical. . . .awesome. . . .
And I think, queerly, of deep, green caverns
Far under the roar of the ocean.
How slow. . . . .slow. . . .slow
The old clocks striking at midnight. . . .

In comparison
With this hurrying, rhythmical beat of these mighty engines,
Timed to the fraction of a second.
High over my head, on a brick wall
A shrill piercing gong strikes now and then rapidly. . . .
Cleaving the roar and the rhythm. . . . .
I understand nothing. . . .

* * * * * * * * * * *

Now I shall simply write down, laboriously. . . .
As a child writes. . . .
And very reverently. . . .
GOD
SUNDIALS
CLOCKS
ENGINES
TIME AND ETERNITY.

THE LITTLE DEATH

A tiny thing, the latest born of six: . . .
A miserable, superfluous gift that Life
Brought to her in the guise of a sweet dream,
And she awoke to feel a shuddering fear. . . .
"How *could* they feed and clothe another?" she said.
"And pay the doctor for her lying-in?"
Yet with the help of a neighbour she struggled through.
But when they brought her the puny, sickly thing
For the first time, she missed the mother thrill.
Fretfully, flushed and angry, she turned away.
So unlike any of the other five. . . .
Her splendid babies who were the pride of the street.
She knew at once this was a different kind.
Its wizened, wrinkled face of suffering
Repelled her from the very first. . . .and yet
It thrilled her strangely.
All through that first month
She grew more silent. . . .conscious of mystery,
As never before in all their glad, hard life
Ruled by their splendid healthy bodies, their kindly hearts,
And downright common sense and interest
In getting a living out of a rough world,
That yet was a good, noisy, merry world,
Made for the conquering by healthy folk, . . .
Never before had she thought much of night,
Except for sleeping.
Her waking always meant
Merely to give the breast to a hungry mouth,
And hardly open her eyes or wake sometimes,
In mind, at all.
But now she learned the night,
And watched it through an uncurtained window pane.

Once that weird, feeble wailing made her dream
That he. . . .this tiny, shrivelled, sickly son,
Who seemed to her quite sexless, even yet. . . .
This uncanny, starving atom was calling her
With his weak wailing from somewhere outside,
In a pale moonlight with the myriad stars
Above her. . . .Then she thought that he must be
In one of the stars, and she must rise and go,
Stepping out bravely into the cold dark
From the warm huddled beds, and sleeping forms,
That she adored with all her passionate heart. . . .
To find and succour the small, unwelcome one
Who stole their mother from the other five.
Yet she must go she knew, and she awoke
In a resigned, cold agony that caught her breath.
She laughed in relief when she found it was just a dream.
But next day she took the child to the hospital
And the long fight began. . . .oh how it fought,
For days and days, long after they gave it up.
Just at the last when they told her it was gone
She felt a strange, black laughter leap and choke
Her dry and silent throat.
"Baby!" she cried. . . .
"Baby!"
And caught him up and held him close and warm,
And kissed and kissed the tiny withered face,
And the poor, feeble, struggling breath came back
For a long hour of seeming agony.
But it was over at last and they buried him.
And she went back. . . .
To her warm sturdy five,
Their ringing laughter and their rosy flesh,
Their clinging arms and tears so easily dried. . . .

How easy her work, how peaceful the neat house
Without that wailing problem to be solved
At every moment, that small tortured form,
All the repulsive service, the expense. . . .
Solved now by that majestic, kindly Death
That even the wise, calm folk at the hospital
Accepted at the end as a great god.
So through the days she grew herself again,
Though not so noisy and merry as before.
But in the nights,
Beside her sleeping man,
She lay and thought of the mysterious dark.
And something deep within her called. . . .
And called. . . .
To that weird, unloved spark of infinite life
That had gone faring forth among the stars.

THE CREATORS

"I do not understand that"
People say.
"Away with it!"—
Of painting or of poem or of song,
Or symphony.
Condemning it.
Thrusting it from them if they can
(And that's always easy!)
For the tried, obvious, conventional thing
That years ago some brave soul met perhaps
With pain and striving,
Piercing its mystery,
Solving its problem. . . .
For to every age
Come the Creators, bearing in their hands
New gifts born in the travail of their souls.
Perhaps at times not wholly understood—
These new-born things,
By those that gave them birth.
Shall they be met with the old ice-bound cry?
"We know it not!" "We do not understand!"
"Away with it!"
Even so they cried in old Jerusalem,
When the Christ came among them
Strange and strong,
The great Creator, with new harmonies,
New doctrines and new words,
Illumining
Dim, darkened Beauty
With new, blinding, light.

THE TOAST

NOW thank we all our Poets who have given
Their magic gifts of sunshine-woven song.
Here's loving tribute to them, the clear-seeing
Who sang of Life and Love, of Death and Wrong.

Suppose some power Satanic stole our sonnets,
Or buried deep in mire our Grecian urns,
Suppose some blighting wind destroyed our red rose,
That song for lovers, gift of Ploughman Burns !

Just fancy if from this gray world was taken
Our Wordsworth's hoard of golden daffodils,
If hushed and still was little Pippa's singing,
And no Keats "stood tiptoe on little hills."

Now thank we all our Poets (safe enfolded
In golden mists amid the hills of God).
Our loving cup we pass, and thus we pledge them,
"The souls who felt the 'stir of might in clod.'"

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